

HARRY LUMSDEN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

AFRO-AMERICANS IN SAN FRANCISCO
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

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Co-Sponsored by:

The Friends of the San Francisco Public Library and
The San Francisco African-American Historical and Cultural Society

Project Coordinator: Lynn Bonfield

HARRY LUMSDEN

September 26, 1978

At Office of the Shipyard Laborers Union, Local #886, 2085 Third Street,
San Francisco

Interviewer: Jesse J. Warr, III
Transcriber: Mary Wells

JW: When and where were you born?

HL: I was born in the West Indies. I'm not giving you too many
details because I have it detailed in my book.

JW: What year?

HL: 1899.

JW: In Jamaica?

HL: Yes.

JW: Did you go to school before leaving Jamaica?

HL: Oh, yes.

JW: How far did you go?

HL: Elementary.

JW: Were your parents educated people?

HL: Well, I wouldn't...I don't know how far they went, but I know
there was education in the family. I don't know how far my
father went.

JW: What kind of trade did he have?

HL: Oh. My mother and father died when I was eight and nine years
old, so I couldn't tell you about their trades. The people
living in that part of the country were really more along the
agricultural lines.

JW: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HL: Oh, yes. Two brothers and one sister.

JW: What order were you? Were you the youngest or the oldest?

HL: The oldest.

JW: Are all of them still living?

HL: Oh, no, no. I'm the only one alive.

JW: Did any of the others emigrate to the United States?

HL: No. See, they all died before I left home. Most of them died young. My sisters and my brothers all died young.

JW: From what?

HL: I don't know.

JW: When did you decide to come to the United States?

HL: When did I decide to come to the United States? Well, suppose we leave that out. I lived in...we emigrated from Jamaica to South America. We didn't come directly to the United States.

JW: Who is "we"?

HL: My uncle and I. I lived with my uncle.

JW: Your mother or father's brother?

HL: On my mother's side. I lived with my uncle.

JW: And why did you leave Jamaica?

HL: What?

JW: You said you left Jamaica.

HL: Yes. My uncle...I left Jamaica with my uncle. He had a pretty good position in South America.

JW: Where in South America?

HL: In the Republic of Columbia.

JW: Oh. Were there alot of Black people in Columbia at that time?

HL: No, not too many. There were lots of West Indians. I'm diverting now. There weren't a lot of Jamaicans in Columbia. There were quite a few, but not too many.

JW: I mean native Black Columbians?

HL: There were very few native Black Columbians. Those people are mixtures. In Columbia most of the people, most of the people down there are mixtures, sort of a mestizo type: part Indian, part White, and so on. But there are not too many. Most of the Blacks that are there are people that emigrated from the West Indies down there at that time.

JW: To do what kind of work?

HL: What? Well, some of them worked on plantations and the railroad. My uncle was general secretary of the railroad company. [?] He had a very good education, so he had an exceptionally good job. He didn't go to work in the fields. Most of the others are people that worked on the railroad or on the plantations.

JW: What kind of work did you do?

HL: What? My uncle was general secretary of the railroad company and he took care of the business of the railroad.

JW: What did you do while you were there?

HL: When I was there, I was in my early teens. I didn't do anything.

JW: Did you go to school?

HL: I went to school. My uncle was a school teacher, so I got some of my advanced...so-called advanced training from my uncle. But when I went there...when I left Jamaica I was going to school, and down there there weren't enough people to have schools for themselves. I mean among themselves, so if you...if your parents have got any kind of education, why they tutor you. My uncle was a school teacher, so I didn't have any problem at all. He taught me and other children.

JW: Did you speak Spanish?

HL: No, we didn't. We didn't merge into the society from the standpoint of language. Most of the people went down in that part of the country not to live but just to work, with the intention of going back where they came from.

JW: About how old were you during this period?

HL: Oh, I was in my teens. But I don't want to go into my...I'll give you when I was there: I was just about sixteen. Just about sixteen years old.

JW: When did you first hear about Marcus Garvey?

HL: Marcus Garvey? Oh, I was in Baltimore, Maryland when Garvey got started. Garvey didn't get started until the Twenties.

JW: Well, he came to this country in 1916.

HL: 1916: Yes, but he...it was...

JW: He had the UNIA. It was pretty strong by the end of the War.

HL: The UNIA got strong around 1918, 1920 and '21. But it was just sort of a grass roots organization probably in...maybe 1916 and so on. But the first time I knew much about the UNIA is I worked with them in 1920, '21.

JW: Here in the United States?

HL: Oh, yes. Sure.

JW: You hadn't heard about Garvey before you left Jamaica?

HL: No. I don't remember hearing about Garvey.

JW: How did you get involved in the UNIA?

HL: Well, it was the trend. It was so very well organized that everybody virtually wanted...I wouldn't say everybody...but a lot of people wanted to join the UNIA because the program was quite attractive...very attractive program. It was something along the line of what this young man was trying to do in Oakland. What was his name?

JW: Huey Newton?

HL: Who?

JW: The Black Panthers?

HL: Oh, no. No. Something along the line of Don...what's his name? Don Wharton.

JW: Who?

HL: You never heard of Don Wharton in Oakland?

JW: No.

HL: I think he has about, in my opinion, one of the best organizations and the best organized on the self-help line. Not by the Black Panthers. No. He's [Wharton] a lawyer over there, and he has an organization. That's the fellow that goes to Africa and other places. [Break] Go ahead with your questions. I'll start to make some comments and may get to it later.

JW: You joined up with the Garvey movement in 1919?

HL: I joined the UNIA about 1920...1919 or '20. I don't know... towards either the end of 1919 or the end of 1920.

JW: And which chapter were you a member of?

HL: Well, I joined in Baltimore, Maryland.

JW: What were you doing in Baltimore?

HL: I lived in Baltimore. I used to sail. You see, when I came from South America here, I served in the Merchant Marine during the First World War. I was sailing out of Baltimore to France, and so on and so forth. So when the War ended in 1919, I lived in Baltimore. Baltimore was my home port, you see.

JW: When did you decide that you were going to stay permanently in the United States?

HL: Well, I don't know. I couldn't say. I couldn't pinpoint a date, but I came here. From all indications this is just as ideal a place to live as anywhere else, so I made myself a part of it.

JW: Was your uncle still living at this point?

HL: Oh, yes. My uncle was still living in South America at that time.

JW: Were you in contact with him and the rest of your family?

HL: Oh, yes. We keep in contact with the rest of our family.

JW: Turning back to the Garvey movement, how long did you stay in the Movement?

HL: I stayed in with the Garvey movement until about...until things started to go down. It must have been about 1923, because by that time I had moved from Baltimore to San Francisco. And I remember the last time Garvey...I've seen him in person and talked with him...was in 1922. He came here to San Francisco.

JW: What was he like?

HL: What was he like? He was a short, very dark man. He was... Garvey wasn't much taller than...as I remember, Garvey was probably about five foot six or five foot seven. He was kind of a bald type fellow, very black. He was very dark, a fine-looking fellow. But he had it up there. [In his head]

JW: How did he approach people?

HL: Well, he was dynamic. In other words, he promoted an organization that was in fact along the same line as, say, the NAACP. Along the same line in certain respects. That is in trying to uplift the Negro, and trying to make him aware of his identity, and the fact that he should have a place in the community, etc. etc. But he was a little different in that he extended himself, and he extended the purpose of his organization a little different. For instance, Garvey...they did something along the line of... there's another organization...they opened grocery stores and they bought excursion boats in New York where the Negroes would have their own excursion boats and go up and down the Hudson. They bought a steamship that was plying between the United States and South America. In other words, they were promoting the idea that Negroes should have direct commercial communication with different regions of the world where the majority of the people are Negroes. Those were the days when you could call a man a "Negro" and it wasn't insulting. Call a man a "Negro" today, why he throw you overboard if he's near the waterfront, at least from here. [This office] As I said, he bought a big steamship. One of the old time steamships that was...I think it was used in World War Two, or it might have been before World War II. But it was named...they named it the "Booker T. Washington", and it sailed from here. I mean the United States. I'm not pinpointing any port. But one trip was to Brazil. And it was old. I think they had a hard time even getting it back here. But they did buy that ship. It was manned by more so... I think nearly all the crew were Negroes. The captain of the ship, I happened to know him personally.

JW: What was his name?

HL: His name was Mulzak. I don't remember his first name. But it's M-u-l-z-a-k, Mulzak. He was a West Indian Negro, and he learned navigation because, you see, on the West Indian Islands, they have lots of sailing boats plying between islands. Mulzak, I think he came from the island of St. Vincent. I'm not sure, though. These are things I wasn't prepared to pinpoint exactly, but I know he came from the West Indies. It was either St. Vincent or Grenada. He was the captain, and he was the first Negro that we know of that served as a mate among, I mean, aboard White ships.

- HL: I think he worked for one of the big steamship companies in New York. I don't remember whether it was the Bull Line. I think it was the Bull Line, but I am not too sure. He worked as a mate aboard that ship. I mean he worked as a mate for that company. And when Garvey organized the Black steamship line, he was the first captain. The ship was named the "Booker T. Washington", if I remember right.
- JW: The Black Star Line was the name?
- HL: What?
- JW: The Black Star Line Enterprises.
- HL: Well, as I say, I was quite young then, and I wasn't concentrating on using that material for my purpose. But I know it was... I think it was called the Black Star Line. The Black Star Line, and Mulzak was the captain of the "Booker T. Washington". I worked with his brother during the War, when we used to carry the ammunition and so on for the United States troops in France. His brother was...I think it was James Mulzak. He was chief cook aboard a ship that I worked on. That's one of the reasons I happen to know. I remember this very well.
- JW: Did the UNIA have a chapter in San Francisco?
- HL: Well, I think there was a loose organization. I didn't belong to anything as a chapter. I know he [Garvey] came here in '22... and, yes, I think there was a chapter in Oakland.
- JW: Was that St. Clair Drake's...?
- HL: A fellow by the name of Beckford...I think Beckford...I think he headed that local organization.
- JW: Was he West Indian?
- HL: Yes, he was West Indian.
- JW: Were all the members of....Garveyites out on the West Coast, West Indian?
- HL: Oh, no, no, no.
- JW: Were they mostly West Indian?
- HL: Well, there were quite a few West Indians, but there were just... People didn't isolate themselves from the standpoint of where you came from. It was a matter of a movement that had a tendency to help Negroes, and there were lots of people. No, it wasn't limited to West Indians at all, as far as I know. No, no, no.

JW: What was the first place that you landed in the United States when you first came here? Was it Baltimore?

HL: Yes.

JW: Living in Baltimore, was the relationship between the West Indian Blacks and the American Blacks...?

HL: As a matter of fact, where I came from and my people, we never thought about, we never looked at things from the standpoint of "you're an American and I'm a West Indian", and so on. We looked at it from the standpoint that we are the same. We have the same problems. I never noticed anything of the kind until I lived there for many years. I started noticing it by having gone to church one time, and that was right here in San Francisco. They have a Texas Day, and this day and that, and I wonder what the hell is the difference. We are all colored people. Why a Texas Day, and why this day? In other words, the very thing that we are fighting against and that divisiveness is the very thing that we practice. So I never look at it from the standpoint of being West Indian or this. It's just a matter of we are pushed together categorically as a group, a racial group. So...

JW: Some of the Black people in New York City were very prejudiced against West Indians, and they called them names, and vice versa.

HL: Oh, yes. Lots of people are very clannish. Clannishness is not limited to members of the Caucasian race. Negroes are that way, and they are victims of the propaganda...of the divisive propaganda that has been put out. I run across it right here. Fellows will come and say, "Well, people like you because you have a different accent," or something like that. It seems so silly to me. It doesn't make sense at all. But you see, we divide ourselves because we were trained to divide ourselves. We probably unconsciously divide ourselves to our own detriment.

JW: When you first began living among Americans, especially in Maryland, what was your impression? Were they different from people you had known in other parts of the world?

HL: No. Well, the only difference...you notice certain differences. We know there are such things as speech differences, and the method of living is different. Everywhere you go, the housing conditions are different. All the differences, if you keep your eyes open, you can't help from noticing them. Those are things that are just...they are almost elementary if you keep your eyes open.

JW: The stereotype says that the West Indians were better educated, and had better heads for business...

HL: Oh, no, no. That's about...that's dead propaganda. That's divisive propaganda. I just can't think that way. Let's go back a little bit. Some of the reasons...some of the reasons for the propagating of that misconception is this: Go back to slavery, or a little bit further. We were all victims of slavery. Our ancestors were brought to the Western world as slaves. Slavery came to...it was in the fifteen-something that slaves were brought to the West Indies. Fifteen-something when slaves were brought here. 1519? 1619? 1619 when the Negroes were brought here as slaves, and I think the Spaniards brought them as slaves to the West Indies a little earlier. I forgot the year now. I'll have to check. All right. Well, slavery was abolished in the West Indies earlier than it was abolished in this country. For instance, slavery was abolished in Jamaica in 186...I mean, 1834. The act of Congress, I mean, the act of Parliament was passed in 1834 and the actual abolition took place in 1838. So after the Act was passed, the slaveowners were obligated to give the slaves four years of apprenticeship to prepare them to take their place in society as tradesmen, etc, etc, etc. So while the act was passed in 1834, I'm figuring from history now... [the abolition of] slavery actually became an accomplished act in 1838 because of that four years of apprenticeship that the owners had to put their property through, let's call it, because that's all we were...properties. So it caused a sort of misconception among Negroes, because Negroes in one location became free a little earlier than the others, and it was done under a different act of circumstances. That has a heck of a lot to do with it. For instance, it didn't take a war to free the slaves in the West Indies. It was passed by an act of Congress, I mean, an act of Parliament. Here, it took a war, and you know the difference from the standpoint of human emotion. A lot of Whites were killed. "My grandfather was killed fighting to make you free" and all of that. All of that you put in a big pot, and it becomes a hodge-podge of...hodge-podge of hate, and so on and so on down the line. So it makes a big difference in that the method that was used. I looked at this "Roots" [TV mini-series], parts of it a couple of times, and you could see...when you see what happened there. After the abolition of slavery, they formed the Ku Klux Klan to embarrass the Negro and virtually to wipe him out if they could. When that wasn't done in some the islands because the circumstances, as I said, under which the freedom was given or granted was entirely different. But other than that, it's about the same. The Negro in the West Indies, he has virtually no identity. Almost every man you see look a little bit different, but they throw them out together and called them something. They called him a "Negro" or they call him a "colored" man. Fifty years ago, the man that you call a "Black" man today, you couldn't call him "Black" in the Twenties. He'd throw you through the window. You couldn't call him an "African". You had to call him...you know what they called him?

JW: "Negro".

HL: Hell, no! You couldn't call an American "Negro" in San...They used the word, yes, but Garvey tried to popularize the word with the Universal Negro Improvement Association. It was... you were called "colored". Everybody was "colored". All right. And, of course, some of the members of our so-called race, they objected to it. But, anyway, in general, you were referred to as a "colored" man. Today, everybody is a "Black" man. To me it's a colossal joke. But that's what it is. As far as we are concerned, sometimes I become...we use...a part of our progress is the adoption of slogans. He's a "Black" man, he's a "colored" man, or I'm a "Negro". That doesn't mean a thing. Let's have some constructive progress. That's the thing we need. Let's forget about the slogan and the things of that nature.

JW: Were you ever hired by the UNIA to [unintelligible]?

HL: No, no. No, no, no. I could see...I was young, but I could see some benefit in it.

JW: What do you think was the cause of the failure of the Movement?

HL: Well, there were among...certain types of colored people objected to the existence of the UNIA. That is my conclusion. Some types ...because it was an organization that rivaled other existing organizations. The fellow went out and he was establishing grocery stores, bought steamships, bought riverboats, and so on. In other words, showing the Negro how to inject himself into the economic system. We are all into the economic system to a certain extent. But we are merely there as the producers. We work and produce. But most of us are not in a proprietary position, and that's the thing that counts. Until you get in a proprietary position, you don't even recognize how important you are. Because if you have your job, [as an employee] you say, "Oh, to hell with it". All right. But when you...say you are working here and you are raising a thousand dollars and you start a little business of your own, you are going to take a little bit more interest into business. Let's extend it a little bit more: If you own a little piece of property here, you are going to be interested in just what taxes are, just how the city is built up and so on. But if you just rent, you say, "Oh, what the hell, I'm just renting. To hell with the landlord." I mean, it's not a general conception of most people, but it's there among a lot of people. You see, they haven't got the interest. And that's the same thing with the Negro insofar as the UNIA was concerned. It was trying to show the people that you are a member of the society. And let's be a constructive member of society all the way around...Well, they sold stock, as I remember.

HL: Stocks were sold to enhance these organizations...like the purchase of ships and so on. And that's where they got him. They claim, but I can't prove, that some...a lot of people, probably among our race, along with others, "conspired"... shall we say that?...to get rid of him. And he was prosecuted under the "Blue Sky Law"...the "Blue Sky Law" governing the sale of stocks. I don't know the details of that. But in general, I can tell you that, as I remember it, he was prosecuted for and found guilty of selling stocks contrary to the provisions of the...End Tape 1:1

BEGIN TAPE 1:2

HL: [Unintelligible] He [Garvey] didn't pass the bar examination in this country, but they...as I remember it now, he was allowed to practice because he was a brilliant barrister in England, and I think he had a title. Sir somebody. He was a brilliant lawyer. And I remember, as I say, it was about fifty-odd years ago. I'm just trying to put together pieces that I can remember. He was prosecuted. I remember the name of the prosecutor, a man by the name of Lion, L-i-o-n. He was the member of a particular group that is always complaining about persecution. That, of course, tells the story. You are not dumb. You can figure that out. He referred to Garvey as a man that should be caged, shouldn't be let loose, because he's dangerous! Never forget that! He was a district attorney of...I don't remember if it was Queens...but his name was L-i-o-n. Anyway, that's how they got rid of Garvey. But after the leader...like anything else, when the leader is put in prison...and I don't remember whether he was paroled. Anyway, he went to England and he stayed there for quite a while. He died in...I think he died in London. That was the end of the UNIA, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. As I said, where they made a mistake, he tried to show the Negro how to get into a competitive position, in that they bought a ship. I'm repeating now; they bought a ship, they bought a ferry boat to run up and down the Hudson, and so on and so forth. So that put an end...I know the names...I know the names of some of the so-called Negroes that were instrumental in getting him put in prison. But I am not prepared to name them now. It's pretty well understood by people who were alive at that time. They were some of our well-known leaders. Some of them have lived for many, many years later. I can't think of any that are alive today. But some of them I've met and I knew them. It was a matter of a lot of jealousy, you know. A lot of jealousy.

JW: When did you come to settle in San Francisco?

HL: What?

JW: When did you first come to San Francisco?

HL: I came to San Francisco in 1921.

JW: And you've lived here ever since?

HL: I have lived here ever since.

JW: What brought you here?

HL: What?

JW: Why did you come here?

HL: I was in the Merchant Marine.

JW: What was it about San Francisco that made you decide to stay?

HL: Well, just...nothing in particular. I just happened to come to San Francisco, and I decided to stay here, I guess.

JW: What kind of work were you doing when you first got here?

HL: Well, when I came here, as I said, I was in the Merchant Marine. I used to work aboard ship.

JW: What part of the city did you live in?

HL: When I came here, I lived down South of Market.

JW: Third and Townsend?

HL: That's right. Third and Townsend, because the docks were all near...I mean most of...most of the ships that carried Negro crew docked down that way. I lived at Third and Townsend for a few...oh, a month or so. Then I moved. From Third and Townsend I moved to Third and Harrison. From Third and Harrison I went to sea. Decided to do course work after...you know...There was a big strike on at that time, and after the strike I stayed on for a few months and I lived at Second and Bryant. Then I moved from there and went uptown.

JW: Who was on strike at that time?

HL: Oh, it was a general strike against all unions. The Maritime Unions are on strike. The construction union was on strike. Everything was on general strike. San Francisco is known as one of the greatest union cities in the world, at that time. And in 1921, after the end of the First World War, naturally the powers-that-be set out to break the unions. With that in

HL: mind, they were successful, because, you know, during wartime, all economies boost. It is wartime economy. When the war is ended, I mean when a war ends, the economy is going to fall. Just like we have right now. Today I went to a meeting. [I mean, you don't have to make a record of this if you don't want to.] I went to a meeting today, and I was talking to a man whose father was a captain of a ship on which I sailed to Italy in 1919. All right. We were talking about present day conditions, what is going to happen. This morning I was listening to the financial news and they say that the dollar...in 1939 the dollar was worth one hundred cents. Today it's worth twenty-one cents because of the inflation and so on. What's going to happen? You're going to have a heck of a time getting that dollar again up to where it's worth a hundred cents. The fellow said to me, "I agree. But tell me a little bit more about what you have in mind." All right. Take the man that sweeps the floor in this union. He gets eight dollars and something an hour, right? It's going to take nothing short of a total crash. [Fiscal collapse] In other words, it's just like if you're falling from the top of this building, even though you can see the ledge of this window ledge, don't try to hold on to it. I don't think...you can't. Your weight won't allow you to hold on to it. All you should do if you can keep your senses is just pray that you will hit the deck...hit the ground and don't break any bones. Then you start to climb again. But for you to try to hold on to that ledge to save yourself, it is not in the books. Don't try it. That's just it. People are not going to accept way low wages just to say we want to adjust the economy. Something is going to happen, when that's all you can resort to in order to live is to carry on your so-called "standard of living". As a matter of fact, I don't even like the word. There's no such thing as a "standard of living." I've never known it. No. I don't like the term at all, but we use it. There's no such a thing. You have bacon and eggs this morning. I don't eat any bacon. And I may have some oatmeal. If it was the "standard", we all would have bacon. We all would have...you know. So, I think I diverse from your question you were asking me about.

JW: What brought you to San Francisco, and why you chose to stay here?

HL: Oh, yes. I was telling you that I lived at...I lived at Second and Bryant, and Third and Townsend, and Third and Harrison, and I lived uptown. Over the years, that's it.

JW: Did you ever buy property here?

HL: I'm buying my own home now.

JW: How long have you been in that house?

HL: In my house?

JW: Yes.

HL: Oh, about eighteen, nineteen years.

JW: So for the first thirty years you didn't have any permanent residence?

HL: Well, I have a permanent residence, but not my own. I lived in one apartment for, oh, for twenty-odd years in one apartment.

JW: What section of the city was that in?

HL: That was in the Russian Hill, North Beach section.

JW: What were the general conditions confronting Negroes in San Francisco in the Twenties?

HL: Negroes? When the Negro...

JW: It had the reputation of being the "freest" city in the world.

HL: The freest city in the world? Well, when I came to San Francisco, you could walk the streets of San Francisco...walk Market Street, the main street, and sometimes for two or three weeks you didn't see a Negro. You could walk the streets of San Francisco and didn't see a Negro, but one, two or three. There was a Negro at the corner of Pine and Market...a very dark man...a big, dark man, and he was working for the Spreckels Building. I think it is still there. He was working for old man Spreckels, the father of the Spreckels fortune. Adolph Spreckels or whatever Spreckels it was. He [the Negro] was a doorman there. He was the doorman. You could see him. If you'd go on Market Street you'd see him. There was another Negro. He worked in a tailor shop on Market and Third. It was four doors above Market and Third Street. It was a fellow by the name of McQueen. He worked in the tailor shop. I think he sold...he was a base man [?] or something. There was another one at the corner of Market, Eddy and Powell. You know, by the Bank of America? Well, you are not too familiar here then. At Market and do you know where Woolworth is?

JW: Yes.

HL: That used to be the head office. That corner was the head office, the head store of the Rexall Drug Company...I mean, the Owl Drug Company. This Negro, he was the janitor there. There was another one further up on Eighth and Market where the Jack Tar, I mean,

HL: the Del Webb Hotel was. It's changed it's name now. At that time the Del Webb Hotel wasn't there. A building was there, and before that building there was a market. There was a store at the corner there. He had a bootblack stand. But you could see those Negroes there. There was a fellow down on Market... Market and Pine, Market near Kearney, Powell and Market. And this fellow...you could see them on Market. There were a few Negroes there. Two Negroes worked for the city of San Francisco doing street work. There was one Negro working at City Hall. He was the valet to the mayor. And there was one fellow working there at the Board of Public Works, a very light man. He looked like a White man, but he has got a daughter and some family that still lives here. His name was Terrell. And there are a few other Negroes. Now when you go down Kearny Street to Pacific, that was the old Barbary Coast. You could see a lot of Negroes hanging around there, because I understand they had abolished the red-light district in 1916 and a lot of them hang around from the old days that way. And I think there was one Negro that had a big night club over there. Then come back to Third and Townsend, there were a few Negroes hanging around there.

JW: Were these mostly Pullman porters?

HL: Pullman porters and so on, and a few longshoremen.

JW: Did you ever stay at the New Pullman Hotel down there? Now it's real old.

HL: The Pullman Hotel? No, I stayed at the Townsend Hotel, oh, for about a few weeks. Didn't like the environment, so I moved.

JW: Was this a hotel or something else?

HL: It was a hotel. I moved away from there, because a man who had a bootblack stand near...right across the depot...right across the alley. It used to be the United States Post Office. I went in there to shine my shoes one day and we get to talking. He said to me, "Where do you live down here?" I said, "Well, I'm a stranger. I just got into town." He had a home up at Second and Bryant, and I went up there and lived with him. Just like you come to town you don't know, you're liable to live any place. You'll live the worse place in town. Going back to Negroes in San Francisco, over in the Fillmore District there were quite a few...like at Fillmore and Eddy, and so on. But, as I say, on Market Street now about every other person is a Negro. It wasn't that way. Because I was sitting here and doing some review for my own...what I plan on doing. [An autobiography] I think in the 1920 Census, the Census reported that there were about five thousand colored people. I think they said five thousand. All right, the next Census was in 1930. In the 1930

HL: Census, it was claimed that there were approximately thirty-two...between thirty-two and thirty-four hundred colored people in San Francisco, because, you see, during the First World War quite a few Negroes came here I understand. As I said, I came here in 1921. And they need...they came to work, as longshoremen and longshore and so on. When the War ended, most of them went back where they came from. But when the Second World War ...I was in public relations work with the same organization in the shipyard. We had twenty-seven shipyards, and I did public relations work. And we had thousands...tens of thousands. And in this organization, [Shipyard Workers Union, Local #886] we had eighteen, almost nineteen thousand members. It was about eighty percent Negro. But the War ended and people contemplated that. I guess the society as a whole figured out they were going back like they did after the First World War. But the boys said, "No, no, no. Bongo, bongo, bongo, I do like 'Frisco, and I'm going to stay right here." And here they are. That has brought many, many changes that a lot of people hadn't observed. They don't want to admit it. Now before the advent of the Second World War, you could hardly find anything to do... just a few Pullman porters and a few janitors. All the so-called menial work was done by Europeans, you know. You can imagine who they were, and people didn't get anything. There were a few Negroes in construction work, and most of those Negroes were not American Negroes because American Negroes did not go into that type of work.

JW: Where were these people from?

HL: Most of the Negroes that did construction work did that hard construction work; mixing concrete, and stripping the sides of buildings. I've done it, and I know what I'm talking about. They came from the Hawaiian Islands. See, what happened, they had taken a lot of Portuguese Negroes and colored people from the Cape Verde Islands, and took them out to the Hawaiian Islands to work the sugar plantations. Those people emigrated here to San Francisco and they did most of that work. Then afterwards, the native Negroes got into the act. When I came here, I think I was one of the very few, very few, except for about two or three fellows from Oakland, that did that type of work. They couldn't find work. Then it was pretty rough because there were places where the Whites wouldn't work with Negroes. They wouldn't work with you. You had a hell of a time. That brings me right back to the point where today you hear a lot of people...a lot of Negroes own nice homes in San Francisco. They complain about this and that, but there are lots of Negroes that own nice homes. When you get to talking with people and they say, "Well, you've been here all these years, and you just started to buy a home twenty years ago? If I was living here I would have done this." Well, I just listen to people talk and sometimes they just talk, talk, talk, and we don't know what they are talking about. You can't buy homes if you don't have money. You could buy a nice home out in the Bernal [Heights] District for, oh, four or five thousand dollars.

HL: Those very homes are selling for forty and fifty thousand dollars today. You walk the streets...I walked the streets of San Francisco in 1929. I made four dollars in eleven months. Four dollars! I walk...I walked out four pairs of five-dollar shoes looking for work. I used to walk from Jones and Pacific up in the Russian Hill District right out to Fort Miley where the hospital is out there, through the Presidio. I did that every-day. Get up at four o'clock in the morning and walk out there to save a nickel. Carfare was a nickel...so that when I get back home I could buy a loaf of day-old bread to eat. I walked the streets of San Francisco in 1921, and on one occasion for three days I didn't eat. I could have eaten, but I was too proud to let the people that I was living with know that I was broke. That gives you an idea of what conditions were then. You know, the trouble that most of us went through to make conditions what it is today for the other fellow to enjoy, he doesn't recognize it, and he doesn't appreciate it. Because, as I said, [they say] "Well, I would have done this." How the hell could you do anything if you didn't have money? You couldn't get a job! I've known men to work here...I can point out a building in San Francisco where men, Negroes and Whites, worked for twenty-five cents per hour around 1931, '32. Twenty-five cents. So San Francisco isn't exactly what it looks like today. You are enjoying a paradise. But even paradise you have to clear the land to make a nice garden. You have to clear the land to build a foundation for a good building, any building. So those are some of the conditions that we went through here and we are still going through to a certain extent.

JW: Why didn't more people turn to crime? It was Prohibition era. A lot of money could be made in bootleg liquor.

HL: What?

JW: Why didn't people turn to crime?

HL: What? Crime? Well, I wouldn't venture to answer that. I know that I went hungry many a day, and I wouldn't compensate it with a crime. No, I wouldn't condescend to go that low. And there are lots of people...

JW: When you're hungry...

HL: When I'm hungry, yes. But even though I'm hungry...I know that most people turn to crime when they are hungry, but I can find another way. You know better things. I've known cases...I didn't do it...but fellows went to the police station and said that they were hungry and they gave them something to eat. I know that it happened here. And I understand it happened at other places. All right. And I know that a lot of people have gone to other ...to some organization and got something to eat. For instance, a woman...when the Depression was raging a woman had a soup kitchen down on the waterfront. It was somewhere near Filbert. It was called...the woman...she was termed the "White Angel."

HL: You could go there in the morning, and there were probably thousands of persons there getting a free meal. She got stuff from the merchants that had food. Potatoes that are rotting on the dock on you, and so on, and she fed a lot of people. And you could resort to that. You really didn't have to resort to crime to get something to eat. Most people resort to crime because they want to find an easy way of living. But I wouldn't condescend to think that it's a necessity. No! Right now there isn't a person...I don't think a person should justify going into a crime to get something to eat, because there are ...you have a church organization at the Salvation Army, and there's a Catholic church on Golden Gate Avenue and so on. At least they will give you something to eat.

JW: Did you have any contacts with people who did resort to crime? Was there a lot of prostitution in those days?

HL: I've always considered myself so far above those things that, no. I've known people that did resort to unsavory ways of making a living. But I just can't see it.

JW: What kind of relationship did the police have with Black people in general?

HL: The police? Well, years ago, the relationship with the police was bad.

JW: You're talking about the Twenties and Thirties?

HL: Yes, the Twenties and the Thirties. Yes, it was bad. In other words, there were a few persons that really weren't on the up-and-up. Let's put it that way. There were a few Negroes that got by with virtually murder...a few of them that run gambling and so on. Well, you know, nobody can start a gambling house in any city and operate longer than seventy-four hours before the police know about it. They just can't. So if you're able to continue with it, somebody must know about it, and somebody turns their back on you and your operation. That's the way I see it. All right, I've known instances where Negroes were given a bad time...a bad time here in San Francisco.

JW: Any particular instances?

HL: For instance, I know of an instance. For instance, use myself for an example. I worked on the first building in San Francisco where they used ready-mix concrete. Years ago, you mix the concrete on the job. I worked on the first building where ready-mix concrete was used. I think it's still in existence up here on Union street. I worked from eight o'clock in the

HL: morning until four the next morning and I was...you know, you work hard, hard. And I was just groggy. The reason I worked so long it was the first time concrete had ever been used ready-mixed and they didn't understand. They had to work out a method of handling it. So we worked. On my way home...

JW: You didn't have any breaks for meals or anything?

HL: Oh, we had breaks for meals, but we just continued. And I got off the bus...I got off the streetcar and I was so tired, I was groggy. Now I'm a man, I don't drink. I was groggy. I got off and I had to walk one...I walked four blocks up the hill, and I just leaned on this building after working from eight o'clock in the morning until two the next morning. The police came along and he said to me, "Hey, what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, I'm tired. I'm going home." "Tired? Well, we know you niggers!" And believe me, I wasn't tired anymore! I said, "What did you say?" He said, "I know you niggers. Where are you coming from?" I said, "I'm coming from work, and I'm not a 'nigger' either." I said, "I tell you what you do. You throw away that gun and that blackjack, as big as you are, I'll take you on." He said, "You will, aye?" He arrested me and took me to jail.

JW: On what charge?

HL: I got to jail at three o'clock in the morning or somewhere around there. I got to jail and I stayed there all night until nine o'clock in the morning. When I got to the jail the booking sargeant said, "What did he do?" [Cop's response:] "Oh, he got sassy!" So they booked me and charged me with being a "vagrant". All right? The next morning...but in the meantime they searched me, my pocketbook, my identification card. I was going to school, a particular school. I won't name it. And they booked me. Around ten o'clock they took me out of jail before the judge. The judge ...There were two judges in San Francisco by the same name. One was a Jew, and the other was an Irishman. White, anyway. I went before him instead of the Jew. When my case was called, the judge said, "Well, what's the charge against him?" The guy said, "Vagrancy." He said, "Vagrancy?" I said, "Your honor, may I have a word? I haven't got an attorney. I don't know whether that's necessary. You look at section so-and-so in the penal code, and look for the definition about...there were about three definitions about that time...End Tape 1:2

HL: [Unintelligible..."I can] prove it. I worked from eight o'clock in the morning until two o'clock the next morning. How can a man work about fourteen hours and be a vagrant? It's possible, yes, but there are some other circumstances that would have to intervene." So he just looked at me and looked at the officers and he said, "A vagrant?" The judge looked at me. The judge said, "Okay, officer, you're excused." He said, "Your case is dismissed. Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home. I'm tired." He said, "Will you wait? I will be through with my session in about one hour. Would you like to wait? I'd like to talk to you." I waited. He took me in his chambers. He said to me, "How do you know so much about the charge?" I said, "Your Honor, you know, some of us...so many of us make that terrific mistake of just judging people by the way they look. I could say some things here, but you've been nice enough to ask me to wait, and we're talking now man to man. When we are outside I was behind the open panels. And you have such powerful weapon against me that I have to be careful of what I say. No I'm going to be careful, because I'm going to show all the respect in the world for you. But there is an old saying about judging a book by the cover: It doesn't always work." So I told him a little bit about myself. He said, "Well, I tell you. If you ever need a friend, come to see me." I couldn't hold the tears back. He said, "You come to see me. We need people like you. I don't want to be called [unintelligible], but we need people like you."

JW: What was this judge's name?

HL: I'll give you his name. I don't remember whether it was... the name is just...I remember...you leave that particular place open and I'll give it to you.

JW: What year was this?

HL: This was in nineteen hundred and...I think it was twenty-seven. I'll have to check.

JW: Did you ever have any run-ins with the police?

HL: All right. Here's another run-in. I was driving down Pacific Avenue to Polk. I drove onto Polk. I was in a Model A Ford. In those days the car had mechanical brakes.

JW: Was this your own car?

HL: My own car, yes. I drove down Polk and when I got to Polk I had to stop. I don't remember what I was doing, but I stopped. And a man ran into the back of my car. So I got out to see what happened. He said, "What are you looking at?" I said, "Well,

HL: you hit my car. I just wanted to see if you did any damage." You know, the old Model A Ford, the bumper was so...you're just a kid now. You probably don't know about it. The bumper was far away from the body. You can hit that spring and it didn't [unintelligible]. So I said, "Well, you hit my car." So we get into an argument. I said, "Well, you've dented it a little bit, but..." And right then come a police. "What's going on here?" So I tried to tell him. "Oh, you shut up. Goddamn niggers always want to talk about something!" I said, "Are you referring to me as a..." "Yes, if you don't like...If you say anything, I'll put you in jail." I didn't say anything, and the other fellow told his story. [Policeman:] "Keep going, keep going." I'll give you another incident. I could give you many incidents. I'll give you another incident: I was going...attending an organization, and I drove up Golden Gate Avenue. I got to Golden Gate and Webster and there was a hamburger joint there. I continue going up Golden Gate and I get up to Baker. When I got to Baker...Baker is a rather wide street...a man was...I was going east and west, and Baker runs north and south. I got to Baker. And this man, he came from south and he crossed over and he got to the lane next to the curb. Got in the lane next to the curb. I continued going because he had crossed over before I got there. I continued going and this young police followed me up to where I was going. I pulled in the parking lot and he came and started to write a tag. I approached him, and I said, "What have I done?" He wouldn't answer. I said, "What have I done?" "You failed to yield the right-of-way." "I failed to yield the right-of-way?" "Did you see that man at Baker Street?" I said, "Yes! But he had crossed over. I don't feel that I am obligated to wait until he got on the curb because he had crossed over. I was on the lane next to the center of the street. Now the lane on the other side next to the parking, if I was in that lane, it probably would be a different thing. But I was way over here. I mean, he had crossed over!" So he gave me a ticket. I said, "Well, okay. I tell you what we will do. We'll go to court and tell it to the judge." He said to me, "What do you say?" I said, "We'll go to court and tell it to the judge." He said to me, "Well, since you are going to the judge, I'll give you a ticket for speeding." I said, "Sir, are you going to make a liar out of yourself to maintain your position? Well, do it!" I went about my business, and I went down the next morning and I had to put up fifty dollars to get a hearing. I didn't have the fifty dollars. I didn't have it. I went and I got it and come back and put it up and had the hearing. And we go to court. In the court he told his side, and he was whispering. I said to him, "Your Honor, may I have a word, please?" He said, "Yes, what is it?" I said, "Now I am demanding that the accusing officer speak out so that we can hear

HL: what he is saying. I don't think he is supposed to whisper to you. The court in general, and the entire audience cannot hear what he is saying." He said to me, he said, "You are right." So this fellow was so dumbfounded, and he was so...I mean he was so surprised that he didn't have much to say. All he said was that I didn't yield the right-of-way. Then I retorted by saying, "Now when do you say that a person didn't yield the right-of-way? Your Honor, I wish you would get out your vehicle code and look up the section dealing with yielding the right-of-way. I'm pretty sure you know it, but what do you say? Well, get it out." He said, "All right." I said, "Under the circumstances, would you say that if I am going over here and a man crossed the street, he passed over me? He passed over the lane. The lane that I am in is clear, and he is going on the other side. Am I obligated to stop? I didn't think so." And before the judge could say one thing or the other, the assistant district attorney who was prosecuting me, he said, "Officer, was this man speeding?" I said, "Your Honor, I object to that line of questioning! Is the district attorney trying to create a case here? If I was speeding, it should have been stated in the original accusation. The district attorney cannot come up here and try to make a case by helping the officer whether I was speeding or not because the officer said to me, if I'm determined to come down to the court and question the ticket, then he'd give me one for speeding." So they talked it over. He said, "I'm objecting to that." The judge said, "Well, your case is dismissed." He said, "What do you do for a living?" I said, "I'm a common laborer." He said, "I wish I had you as my assistant district attorney." If he didn't say that, may I never, may the man drop dead here. And there was pandemonium in the court. And I left. I was parked...the Hall of Justice was where the Holiday Inn is on Kearny Street. That big Holiday Inn.

JW: Yes.

HL: They tore that down and the Holiday Inn built that place, and then they built this Hall of Justice this side of the street here. And I was parked on...up where the Bank of America have the [Transamerica] pyramid building. That's where I was parked. I went down to my car, and this motorcycle officer followed me down there. I got in the car and he followed me for about three blocks up to Columbus Avenue...Columbus and Jackson, Columbus and Pacific, Columbus and Jackson. He said, "You win this time, but I'm going to get you." I said, "You know, I'll tell you something. Sure you'll get me. You can get me now. You can shoot me now if you want to. But I tell you something. You haven't got that much brains. If you had any brain, you wouldn't be risking your neck on a motorcycle trying to make a living!"

HL: So that is some of the police that I have had. I had a case where I sued a police and I spent over twenty-five hundred dollars on the case. Well, I don't know what will become of it, but it's in limbo. So that we won't talk about. I know another case. Well, there are many cases. There was a case here in 1932 where...at that time the police used to direct traffic, you know. They didn't have the signals. That was before the first signal. The first signal we have is those like they have in New York where the bell rings. Well, we have those before we have this new type. At that time, the police used to wear a uniform like the old admiral, like the old Navy uniform. Then they changed it to the one they wear now with the Sam Brown belt. At the corner of O'Farrell and Stockton, police were directing traffic and a Negro was crossing. [I don't know whether he was crossing against the whistle or not.] And this police said, "Hey, nigger, turn back!" And he sort of got back, went back and grabbed him and took his...I think he took his pistol away from him. There became an altercation there. And I've never known what happened to that Negro. I heard that...well, I don't know. That's an incident that's deep down in the books some place. But I don't know what ever happened to him. I'll give you another incident: Some years ago in the Twenties, the police...Negroes used to be down at Pacific and Kearny there. They eat in the Chinese restaurant and Japanese restaurants and hang around pool halls. So they used to have a policeman in town that years ago I think he was the middleweight wrestling champion. Great big chest. His face was almost red. They called him...you don't have to make a record of this if you don't want to...they called him "Ass-Kicking Slim".

JW: I've heard of him.

HL: You heard about him? His neighborhood was out there where some of the so-called "tough niggers" was hanging out. And his specialty was kicking...you know. So this time...now I wasn't there...it was reported that there's a pool hall and this fellow had just come from work. And this fellow [Slim] walked in and said, "Get out of here all you so-and-so." And everybody went out. This little man, about my size, and he just continued. The fellow that he was playing with left and he was just playing alone, you know. He [Slim] said, "Didn't you hear me telling you to get out of here?" He says, "Well, I'm not doing anything. I paid to play my pool and there's not..." "Oh, you, I don't expect to find you in here when I come back." He was gone about fifteen minutes, and this guy was just playing pool. When he came back, he went up to the guy and said, "Well, I told you I

HL: didn't expect to find you." "Well, I'm [unintelligible]." And since I can't prove what happened...I wasn't there...he is supposed to have exercised his stock-in-trade, but it didn't happen. Evidently, it was said, he was hurt. And a wagon load of policemen went from the Hall of Justice up there. Now I wasn't there; but it was rumored. They claim that every man emptied their gun in this little Negro. Now whether...I know he wasn't around anymore. Never seen anything of him. I'm merely tell-in you about some of the conditions.

JW: There were supposed to be civil rights organizations to protest those kinds of things.

HL: Oh, well, the civil rights organization...There was the NAACP.

JW: Yes.

HL: All right.

JW: Did anyone ever bring this before them?

HL: Well, the NAACP...have that incident go to the NAACP? Suppose we let that stay in limbo. I know one man, he was an NAACP official, and he was appointed to a job in San Francisco. Heck, he was appointed an assistant district attorney under the father of this Brown that is running for...that is, governor. I knew his father well. I campaigned for him forty-eight years ago, so I know him. This fellow was made district attorney, and the records might show that the Negroes got a worser time under him than they did under the Caucasians.

JW: What period of time are you talking about?

HL: I'm talking about in the Forties...Thirties and Forties. All right. Let's see, for an extent, now right around here, in this area some of the Negroes that have made a mark for themselves from a political standpoint, they did it by stepping on the shoulders and the heads of other Negroes in order to make it. I know one Negro around here was a judge. I went before him on one occasion for a traffic...an asserted traffic violation. You know Oakland?

JW: Yes.

HL: You know where Broadway and Webster come together, right there by the big Broadway Ford? Now you see, I think it's Twenty-third or Twenty-fourth. All right. There's Broadway runs this way. Webster comes this way. I think Twenty-fourth is right here, and this is the Broadway Motors. I came down Webster here, and

HL: here there's a flashing light. It flashes yellow and it shows "Go" here. All right? And it was red here. I stayed here. And up here is 27th, I think, near Sears. I came out of Webster. As I said, I waited until traffic cleared on Broadway, you see. It still shows green and, of course, it means "Go" here. Now it would be foolhardy to barge into...if the traffic was going. But there wasn't any traffic coming. Even though it showed green, there was no traffic coming, but this was a yellow light flashing. Flashing light is caution. I came out here to Broadway, and I get up Broadway and in the left hand lane I turn here. I saw the police officers, but I couldn't see where I was doing anything wrong. He followed me and gave me a ticket. I said, "What's the ticket for?" He said, "First of all, you should not have turned into Broadway." I said, "Well, there's no restrictions there and I get into that left lane and turned." He said, "You should have continued right out Broadway." I said, "Why?" So he gave me a ticket. I went to court. I have a habit of...if I think I'm right, I'm going to fight to the death. I go into court, and the judge, the Negro judge...the colored judge or whatever the hell you want to call him...the officer explained and I asked... [Judge:] "Shut up! Fourteen dollars!" I said, "Well, Your Honor,"..."Aw, shut up!" All right.

JW: What was the NAACP doing in response...?

HL: Well, anyway...

JW: I'm sorry. I thought that was the end of that.

HL: No. I was just telling you about the way the police used to behave here. The police is really, in my opinion, the cause of the Black Panthers...came into being. I'll tell you why: After the [Second World] War, there were tens of thousands of Negroes brought here to work in the shipyards. In Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond, Kaiser had ninety thousand people working in their five shipyards...from Whites and Negroes, on. The Negroes came here. They came to Oakland in droves like they did over here. When the War was over...from all indications, the Negroes are going to be here, and naturally the Establishment got to do something to keep them in their places. So they hired a lot of the old Southerners that used to, you know, they are supposed to know how to keep you in place, on the police force. And that's exactly where the trouble starts. The fellows said, "Well, we are not going to take that anymore," and so on and so forth. Anyway, getting back to this NAACP, I had a case and I went to see this NAACP. I used to be very active in the NAACP. I worked like hell! And, "Well, we can't do anything. It's a case for...well, you just have to get your own lawyer," and so on and so forth.

JW: What was he [head of the NAACP] afraid of?

HL: What?

JW: Was he afraid that it would just be a waste of money and time, or was he afraid of...?

HL: Well, I don't know what he was afraid of. But I can tell you a lot about some of the misgivings of some of our organizations that were maintained and created to help us. Now I know Negroes that took undue advantage of certain conditions. There's no question about that. But so are the powers-that-be. They give people a hard time, especially if you resist. They just figure, well, you take it or you leave here. Of course, things have changed to a certain extent.

JW: What I can't find...I haven't done a lot of research on this, but I don't understand what the NAACP was doing for the local people. I can find information on what they were doing for the Scottsboro boys in Alabama, or for some movie in Hollywood, but I can't find out what they were doing for the people locally.

HL: How old are you?

JW: Thirty-one.

HL: Thirty-one? I'm seventy-nine...will be in about...this is September, October...in less than sixty days, I will be seventy-nine years old. I followed the Scottsboro Boys case from beginning to end. That is exactly where a modern march toward getting a measure of humanity started...with the Scottsboro Boys. That's right. And it wasn't the NAACP alone. There were a lot of organizations, which I won't go into now.

JW: Including the Communist Party?

HL: It was a world...somebody publicized that condition over the world. It was a world uprising against the oppression that some of us were going to cause this thing to get started, and the Scottsboro Boys was it!

JW: Did you know Mr. Elyard McDaniel?

HL: Who?

JW: Elyard McDaniel. I think his name may have been "Ruchell" and a man by the name of Luke was involved in the Scottsboro, and in the shipyards here.

HL: No. No, I don't. But I know the Scottsboro Boys' case started ...because it was a world revolution. The world just revolted against conditions. You see? Anyway, we were talking about San Francisco and I'm extending it probably a little bit too far. In 1932 or '33, a Negro was accused of raping a White woman in Sherman, Texas. They killed him and dragged his body around in the Negro neighborhood for three days before he was allowed to be buried. In Sherman, Texas! You know, I think it was in 1934 or '35 in Missouri...a little town in Missouri...a Negro woman, a Negro was accused of having an affair with a Caucasian woman and they lynched him. In fact, we had a secretary in this union that came from that town.

JW: Sedalia?

HL: It's a little town in Missouri. I don't remember. Then again in Missouri in Maryville, Missouri, Maryville, Missouri...I think it was in '35, another Negro was accused of having an affair with a Caucasian woman and she was a school teacher. They took that Negro to the school house...took him to the pinnacle, the roof of the schoolhouse, and saturated the schoolhouse with fifty gallons of gasoline and set the schoolhouse afire from the bottom up. The Negro was burned to death. When he died you could imagine the pain. Have you ever gotten into the bathtub and turned the wrong spigot on? Have you ever burned your finger? Can you imagine what that fellow went through! When he died, they fought like cats and dogs to get pieces of his bones. While he was burning to death, they were chanting, "Bye, bye, blackbird! I'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal you." This was here. [In the United States] In Jackson, Mississippi, some years ago...I used to take the Crisis years ago, but I haven't taken it lately...a Negro itinerant farmer and I think it was an illicit affair between his wife and his boss's son. The girl became pregnant and this fellow pretended it wasn't his and so on. Anyway, they took this fellow to a bridge and they ...End Tape

Begin Tape 2:2

HL: [Unintelligible] The blood that we have in our history...

JW: Well, what about in San Francisco? They [the NAACP] didn't anything quite that traumatic. But they still didn't come to the defense of people...

HL: A few years ago right up in a little alley here...I saw it in my paper the other day...a policeman in the alley came up to this Negro had a parking problem. So the Negro come after him

HL: with a two-by-four and killed him. [the policeman] Nothing was said. He applied to the retirement board for retirement on the grounds that he was incapacitated and blah-blah-blah. The history is full of that stuff. Some of the things is hardly believable, but they happened here! They happened here!

JW: Did anything like that happen in San Francisco?

HL: What?

JW: Did anything, or any lynchings happen in San Francisco?

HL: No, no. As I know of, there have never been any actual lynchings that I know of. That is, if a policeman...it's all in the matter of how you describe a "lynching". If you figure that it takes a crowd to gather to get rid of you, then we say...but if a policeman, as in this case I'm telling you, that if a policeman shoot you because you are supposed to have done something, that's almost like lynching because there are no due process of law involved. But we never have anything that you can actually term "lynching" here that I know of.

JW: Do you think that the police particularly singled out Black people for their mistreatment, or was this typical of the way they treated a lot of people?

HL: No, I wouldn't...I wouldn't say that. But there are some people ...we have some people that came from some parts of the country where they just hate Negroes, and they have to...they just carry ...you see, it's part of their nature and they...they'll exhibit it any time they have a chance. For instance, some years ago I remember the case of a man, a young man who was a chauffeur for two women that were White. I think they were artists. He was riding with them in a...in a coupe. And a detective from the San Francisco police force, who came from New Orleans, arrested him, put him in jail, because he said where he came from "niggers" didn't ride with White women like that. I have a little scrapbook and I used to cut these things out and save them. I have the name of the...I have to go and check these... I'm just giving you "in general".

JW: What decade was this?

HL: That was in the Twenties.

JW: And he arrested all three of them, the women and the man?

HL: What?

JW: Did he arrest the chauffeur and the women?

HL: He arrested all three of them, and when they found out who the women were, all bedlam broke loose, and the thing was quieted down, because those women could have sued him for all he's worth. But he made a public statement that anytime he sees a "nigger" riding with a White woman, he'll arrest them as long as he's on the police force. That's right. The paper said it.

JW: Going back to the Black community, was there a group of Black people that considered themselves "society"?

HL: Well, yes. There's a lot of people...as far as I know, there's a lot of people that figure that as long as there's a crowd they figure that they are better than the other type. I mean, better than certain members of the community with which they are classed.

JW: And you found this when you came to San Francisc?

HL: Well, I have had a few instances, yes.

JW: For example?

HL: What? Those are things...the only way to fight those things is not to pay any attention to them. In other words, I have found that...take the Negro as a whole: He had a tendency of exhibiting his...his objection, that amounts to the...that amounts to the demonstration of an inferiority complex. And whenever those things happen like people try to think they are better than you and you react, you are giving them grounds on which to continue what they are doing. If you act like they just don't exist, it just will go away.

JW: What about in terms of...Did you "court" women when you were in your twenties and thirties? I don't know the word they used then; "dating", I guess.

HL: What?

JW: Were you frequently out on dates in the Twenties and Thirties?

HL: Oh, in the Twenties and Thirties I knew a lot of women that I visited.

JW: I mean, were you going out with women that their fathers or brothers thought you were inferior?

HL: Oh, no, no! No, no, no! Oh, no, no! There were several people I know...no, no, no! I never was the kind of guy...I didn't have a hell of a lot of time to be running around with Jane and Judy and so on. I was too busy trying to learn something for my betterment.

JW: Did you ever get married?

HL: No.

JW: Did you find that it was a drawback in anyway, not being married?

HL: Oh, no, no. The only drawback that I have found is economic. I just...I was reared by a woman that had a lot of children, and she always insisted that you should try to have an economic foundation before getting married. A fellow that gets married when he's broke and has nothing, if he gets ahead, he's a super-man, because when obligations start piling up and he has no way of meeting them, he generally goes to pieces. But if you have a foundation...for instance, I can't see any man with twenty-five dollars in his pocket...probably just enough to buy a marriage license...and going and getting married. I just can't see it.

JW: But in those days, wasn't it difficult to have any kind of sexual relations with a "respectable" woman without being married?

HL: Well, that's one thing I don't go into.

JW: What's that?

HL: What? I don't...I don't...Sex relationships as far as I'm concerned is...I'm looking for the right word. In other words, promiscuous sex relationships I never could go for. I was taught that that is not it! No time! After all, we worked hard to govern our emotions and not our emotions govern us. That goes for sex relationships, your anger, and anything else. You are the master of your emotions. Most men don't see it that way. After all, I like the way the British look at it. For instance, I don't know about now, but years ago a man couldn't get a divorce in England because there is no possibility of sexual relationship between he and his wife. No, no grounds for divorce. Here, why heck, you can always allege that and it would be grounds for divorce. So I never could see life from the standpoint of sex. Sex is really...it's something that is resorted to for the sake of propagating or producing our own kind. But from a promiscuous standpoint, no.

JW: Well, some people do it just for the pleasure.

HL: Pleasure. Yes, pleasure. You know that reminds me...when you said "pleasure", it reminded me of a little poem I read years ago. It went like this: "Pleasures are a hope, the ills of life alloy, And picture pleasures that we never shall enjoy, Though pain and pleasure, hope, grief, and share, All are conditions of existence here." I think there is so much sex,

HL: like today. Kills you! This day and age...sex, sex! Animals, the lower animals, we are not even as good as they are. They don't stress it. It is a matter of time and place. Here it seems to be the dominant thing on our minds. Sex! Sex! Sex! Sure, it's important.

JW: [Unintelligible] Now it's being used to sort of keep people's minds off of other things. The commercial media and everybody else cashes in on it now, because they don't want you to think about other things...but anyway, what about "color consciousness" in this country?

HL: Color consciousness?

JW: Do you know what I'm talking about?

HL: Yes! Yes! Color consciousness. When I first came to America, I knew about color consciousness because color consciousness is all over the world. I don't care where you go. And the Caucasians have been smart enough to use that as a means of strengthening himself and building up power. For instance, there are some parts of the world where they have a lot of people that have mixed blood. A lot of people. All right. For instance, there's a certain place I know...I won't name it right now...where there is a population of about eight hundred thousand. Of the eight hundred thousand were a few thousand Hindus; pure-blooded Hindus, Chinese, and about over five hundred thousand Blacks, and a few, quite a few thousand mulattoes, people with mixed blood. All right. The dominant country is a European country. And what they did, they organized. It was such that everybody had the privilege of exercising the franchise of voting. And, of course, you know, that's where the power comes in. That's how...if it hadn't been for that, the Negroes in here wouldn't get any place. That's franchise. In the South, in Atlanta, and some of those cities, for years and years you had more Negroes than you had Whites. Yet they didn't get any place because they found means of keeping them from exercising the elective franchise. Now with this particular country, and quite a few countries in the same category, they organized the people that are technically out of the category of being "Black". And they fix things so that they get fairly good jobs. And they take all the so-called "minority" ...when I speak of "minority", I'm talking about racial minority. I took on one of our Negro politicians here not long ago on this question of "minority". They organized the minorities, and they said, "Now look. There's a war over there, [unintelligible], and therefore, you have a better chance anywhere. So why stick with me?" And that was done. So they were able to balance the effect of everybody having the power to vote and continue and perpetuate themselves just through that little gadget.

- HL: Now in this country [USA] in my study it has been that it has never been exercised, because if that had been exercised, then the conditions would have been much different. I remember years ago, patronage...years ago before Roosevelt, nearly all the patronage in the South changed. The state of Mississippi specifically was distributed by a Negro. I forgot the name of the family. But it was a rather well-known family. He was a Republican and [unintelligible.] So naturally during all those Republicans like Hoover and among them, that family distributed the patronage in the state of Mississippi. If you see them you wouldn't know if they were Whites or Blacks. They're not White.
- JW: What about here in San Francisco, did people pay any attention to what complexion you were? Or was it more a question of something else?
- HL: Well, not too much, but it's there. It's here. It's here! It's an ingrained thing. We have it from local governments right up to the federal government. You check your federal government today and see what you see. You're intelligent. You check it.
- JW: What do you mean? In terms of complexion?
- HL: [Unintelligible]
- JW: But what I'm talking about, there's two things...I don't know if they apply to San Francisco, but they do in other places. One is that darker-skinned men choose light-skinned wives.
- HL: What?
- JW: That dark-skinned men pursued lighter-skinned women, and certain cliques of people would only associate with people of their general ancestry.
- HL: Well, they had...they had that years ago here. I heard about it. I know...I know people that confess that they know about it, but I think it's dying out. It's dying, what, a natural death? A natural death. It's dying out. People can see the ignorance of the whole thing. They can see that you are being used against the other fellow and we are getting wise.
- JW: I just want to talk a little bit about the Black churches before the tape runs out.

- HL: Churches? Well, all right. When I came to San Francisco, there were four Negro churches, four. Three established churches. Let's see if I can remember. The Third Baptist, two Methodist... oh, five...and one mission, two missions. Two missions.
- JW: Catholic missions?
- HL: No, no. At that time, there weren't any Catholic missions for colored that I know of. Not then, in the Twenties. The Third Baptist and two African Methodists and the other Methodist and two missions. One of the missions was an old lady had a church up here called "Old Lady Jones". A Pentecostal church. All right. Today you must have at least ten thousand, it seems to me. [Chuckle] I don't want to exaggerate. All the empty stores, they are all churches.
- JW: I hadn't heard about this Mrs. Jones.
- HL: Oh, yes. Mother Jones' church, up at Post. It started down here at Kearny and...Kearny and Pacific. Kearny, Pacific and Columbus. You see, I think there's a nightclub there called the "Pup" or something down in the basement. That's where it started. And the woman, I think she died a few years ago, a short, very dark old lady, she started "Old Lady Jones' Missionary". She fed the...if you were down and out, White, Black, Green and so on, she fed them. There was another mission up on Clay Street between Stockton and Powell. A fellow named Tayes, T-a-y-e-s. Tayes run that mission.
- JW: Was that Pentecostal too?
- HL: Well, I don't know what you call it, but it was a religious mission. There were five that I know of when I came here. I don't know of any more. I don't think there were any more. Of course, at that time, as I said, the population was approximately between four and five thousand known colored people. Then as the population grows...now the last time I heard...I'm not sure. I haven't checked with the Census Bureau...there are approximately ...there are over a hundred thousand, about one hundred and ten thousand colored people in this city today. About one out of every six or seven are Negroes, I mean, so-called "Blacks" today.
- JW: Did you join any churches here?
- HL: Well, when I was a child I was...I was...I was brought up in the Episcopal church.
- JW: Anglican.

HL: What?

JW: Anglican church.

HL: Yes, Anglican. Yes. Some people say Anglican for Episcopal. But I never joined any church. I never joined any. I worked ...for years I always worked as a volunteer. I don't believe in attaching myself to any denomination. It is too depressing. I want to be able to help anybody, and I've done it. At one time I lived up in the Nob Hill district. I lived a couple of blocks from Bethel A.M.E. Church. I used to go there on some Sundays and help them with the Christian Endeavor. And I lived near the Baptist Church, and I used to go there on young people's Sunday and lecture and so on and so forth. Then the other church was out on Geary Street, and I knew the minister and so on, but I never did go there. And I have gone out to Mother Jones' church on Christmas because I liked what she was doing. She helped the down-and-outs. I put fifty-cents or so on to help. But to affiliate with any particular one, I don't.

JW: What was the quality of sermons in those days? Did they encourage people to use Christianity as a way of improving their life in this world, or did they use it in a way to think about the next world?

HL: Well, in other words, my conclusion is they teach people to spend all they have in preparing for the world to come and depend on other people to take care of their immediate and present needs. That's a terrific conclusion, but that's what I have come to. I can't see...now, there are a few...I've listened to a lot of these people just like I on Sunday morning listen to some churches. I keep my radio on a certain station and whatever comes on... For instance, I listen to KGO. On KGO in the morning they have the Message of Israel concerning the Jews which is very, very intelligent and propagandic.[sic] But those rabbis, they're educated people. Don't fool yourself. It's instructive and propagandic, but they are good. Once in a while I switch over and listen to the Mormon...the program coming from the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City, where the colored people are not allowed to join the Mormon Church. I wouldn't worry about that. I don't want to go to nobody's church that doesn't want me. The only time I'm going to fight with anybody to be along with them is when I am paying taxes, and I want to be able to send my kids to the same school; I want to be able to use the same road. But you can have your country club! By God, if you give me enough

HL: jobs, I can build a country club of my own, and I can do other things of my own! But I am not going to fight with nobody to go to his church at all. Never! You see, it's schools and things that I have to contribute towards creating and maintaining, I'm going to fight to try to be allowed to enjoy it. So, as I say, I listen to the Mormon program. It's more an exposition of concertive philosophy rather than a sermon, telling you what's going to happen, you're going to die and go to hell, and all of that. I just can't see it. I call myself...I think I'm a little bit too "foolish". The other guy is saying, "I won't use the word 'intelligent'". I'll say I'm "foolish" because I can't see it. I can do a little thinking of my own. And when you're going to try to hand me a line to get the dollar in my pocket, and tell me what's going to happen to me when I'm dead. Now look, young fellow, try another one. Like the fellow in New York will send you a piece of cloth and you give him a hundred dollars. How can...this day and age! You know, one of the things that irk me right where I am...to see in this country ...there's no other country in the world where education is plentiful and is free as here. No other country! And I have traveled the world, and saw quite a bit of the world. And yet we are not taking advantage of it at all! When I see an abnormally ignorant person come up to my window, [at the office] it makes me sick, because there is no reason for it! I can understand a young fellow that is taken off a farm in Mississippi and he come here; he's disadvantaged. But you take a fellow that is born in San Francisco and can't read and write his name, and the first thing he comes there and he is holding a conversation with you and you say, "You know what I mean?" "Yeah, I seen a dude going down the road..." It just burns me up! Because we are not learning to communicate, and since we are not communicating, we can't compete. I have people of all races coming here. You'd be surprised. You take the Japanese and others. It makes you feel proud of humanity to see how some of those people conduct themselves. Now I'm not saying we don't. There are lots of us [who do,] but there should be more because of the fact that the privilege is here. There is no excuse! Some of the excuses we have been putting out about, "Well, we have been held down for years." Sure, we have been held down! There's no question about it! So have others. You study your European history. The only difference between shackled slavery here and the condition of the serf over there is that their name is a little different. It was an intra-racial oppressive condition as against an inter-racial oppressive condition. That is, you're sure you get what I mean? It's the White man, the Caucasian oppressing Caucasian; and in this case it's Caucasian oppressing Afro-American. But it's the same thing. They went through just the same. I think of "Roots" here. I notice one part where the fellow, the White man, said, "The

HL: only difference between me...if I get away and go over to the next country, I'm White, and they won't suspect that I'm a runaway, but if a Black man does, they will know it. And that's what the difference is".

JW: What would you say is the basic source of your ethical beliefs?

HL: The basic source?

JW: Yes. Your parents or your...

HL: Oh, I was raised by a grandmother, and she was a stickler for propriety. She was...she was religious, yes. But she always maintained...she was an old woman living a hundred years ahead of her time. She always said, "Religion should be used as a means to an end...the means to an end...but it is not the end". As far as you and I are concerned...I'm sorry I have to include you...we are...as far as we are concerned, we think that religion is the end. We act that way. We are treated that way. All right. When a person will take his last penny and give to some guy that cannot read and write his name, because he tells you about what is going to happen in Hell, and you go and beg and you'll stand up in the relief line tomorrow and have to get some meal and you give the other fellow something...give him what you have...something is wrong. In other words, it's fear. You know, the average one of us, we are impelled by fear. I try not to be. Of course, it's a human failure. Sure, we all exercise it to some extent. Because if a guy point a gun at you...I was held up on my job so I know what it is...sure, sometimes you are so afraid that you are not afraid. Like the average "hero". He's not a hero. He was so doggone scared that he just didn't know what he was doing. And he happened to do the right thing, and got away with it. And he is given a medal for being a brave guy. But the surprise that we are confronted with under certain conditions, we can't help but exercise a certain amount of fear. But Negroes, I don't know. The hoodo doctors back in our homeland, huh, they use it. We blame other people, blame the Caucasian. But it is something inherent in the beginning that is being carried out on the other person...other people exploited to our detriment. You look at "Roots", and a lot of people get ...and it makes me mad sometimes, and you want to...but wait a minute. I said to myself, "What the hell? When those ships went to West Africa and other parts of Africa, and get the Negroes, the White man didn't get off the ship and go and hunt me down with guns and this and that. My brother brought me there and sold me. So let's give him a little bad time." Let's think about that. While you are appraising the thing, let's think about that. All right.

END TAPE

